

## Poetry in the language classroom: Humanizing teaching material

Samikshya Bidari

Globally, teachers have advocated that creativity and language learning are inextricably linked. Kramersch (2009) expressed her belief concerning language learning by asserting that “the language learning experience is likely to engage learners cognitively, emotionally, morally and aesthetically” (p. 43). Traditionally, it is argued that using poetry has positively impacted the EFL classroom. According to Bobkina and Dominguez (2014), poetry has universal themes shared by people from all over the world in different cultural contexts, making it accessible to a wide range of EFL teachers. Incorporating poetry into the teaching is linked to the concept that students should be provided greater freedom to express themselves creatively. Hanauer (2012) suggested that adding poetry into the classroom has helped foster a safe learning environment by providing opportunities for self-expression. According to Gutkovskii (2021), “poetry can be utilized to focus learners’ attention on both tales and specific language qualities employed by authors” (p.14). The emphasis on reflecting emotional experiences empowers students to discover their motivations for writing creatively in English. Language learning is a personal endeavor that intersects with a broad spectrum of human potentials. This lesson plan aims to inspire teachers to humanize the teaching process with poetry.

Engaged students adhere to behavioral norms such as regular attendance and participation, and they seldom engage in disruptive behavior. Gutkovskii (2021) mentioned that with poetry learners are more invested in the writing process and focus on emotional significance. Students who are cognitively engaged will be invested in their learning, strive to go above and beyond the requirements, and embrace the challenge. Bidari (2021) also emphasized that active student participation in the language classroom is crucial for a practical, student-centric teaching approach. Adding poetry entails participating in a realm of enhanced experience through the living power of language and the act of manifesting the world through exclusively chosen words. In another study, Schroeder (2010) observed that poetry writing also provides students a sense of accomplishment by offering them engaging activities that do not emphasize mistakes and motivate them. Kalogirou, Fernández, and Mnguez-López (2019), argued poetry has long had a poor connotation in education, and it is perhaps the most poorly taught and disregarded subject in the classrooms. Despite such discouraging findings, educators continue to explore new strategies and approaches to help their students better experience poetry. In a similar vein, this practical pedagogical idea aims to contribute to poetry teaching and its overall benefit in a second language classroom.

As with any artistic or other topic woven into an English lesson, there will be very excited students, as well as those reacting with disdain or apathy. An adept, resourceful teacher can demonstrate to all students that there is something in poetry for them too. Teachers can bring a poem to be analyzed or discussed. Students can find a poem that they like and share in the class. Forms of poetry can be presented, including; couplet, tercet, quatrain, haiku, senryu, tanka, cinquain, clerihew, limerick, roundel, to name a few. Students can choose one form and try to write their own. Famous poets can be studied. Small groups of 2 to 5 students can write a poem together, choosing a topic, and writing one line each. Illustrate a poem.

Read a picture book depicting a poem. There is so much about poetry to discuss with your students. Poems are not usually fully understood after just one reading. Why is that? Poetry is an art. Discuss or define what art is. Is art just for artists? What does art do? What is art for? Which is the best art? What is the role of art in history? What are the grammatical requirements of a poem? What is “poetic license”?

The following sample lesson plan aims to demonstrate how to use poems to teach linguistic skills. The poem entitled “Our Deepest Fear” by Marianne Williams is used to create this lesson plan.

**Proficiency Level:** Advanced

**Age group/ Time:** 15-19 years old 45 minutes

**Material:** Worksheet of the poem with 10 missing vocabulary.

**Objective:** By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. be inspired to use creative writing to enhance self-expression.
2. will experience mindful reading, listening, and writing.

Time	Activities	Description
5	<p><b>Warm-up</b></p> <p><b>Discuss in pairs, what does the author mean by these lines?</b></p>	<p>Greetings: Say hello!</p> <p>Ask students if everyone around them is safe from Corona or any illness. (Allow extra 2-5 minutes if they have something to share, this helps us to build rapport with our students and show that “we care” for them.)</p> <p><i>“Poetry looks like a game and is not: a game does indeed bring men together but in such a way that each forgets himself in the process. In poetry on the other hand man is reunited on the foundation of his existence. There he comes to rest; not indeed to the seeming rest of inactivity and emptiness of thought, but to that infinite state of rest in which all powers and relations are active.”</i> “Martin Heidegger (1949)</p>
15	<p><b>STEP 1</b></p> <p><b>Communicative activity</b></p> <p><b>(Building background/ setting context)</b></p>	<p>Make groups of 3-4 students and make one leader per task. Explain the role of a group leader: take a lead to ask questions and make sure the conversation doesn’t stop. Others should expand and form new questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What was the first poem you ever read? How old were you then?</li> <li>2. Do you have a favorite poem/poet?</li> <li>3. Do you think poetry should be a part of our English lesson? Yes, or no? Why?</li> </ol>

<p>10</p>	<p><b>STEP 2</b> <b>Poetic activity</b></p> <p>What word do you think fits in each gap?</p> <p><b>(Answers)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>fear</b></li> <li>2. <b>powerful</b></li> <li>3. <b>light</b></li> <li>4. <b>frightens</b></li> <li>5. <b>talented</b></li> <li>6. <b>enlightened</b></li> <li>7. <b>insecure</b></li> <li>8. <b>manifest</b></li> <li>9. <b>permission</b></li> <li>10. <b>liberated</b></li> </ol>	<p>Ask students to read carefully and try to guess what words fit into the..... blanks.</p> <p>Share the worksheet and send them to breakout rooms with the poem in which there are 10 words missing. Ask the students to read the text carefully and think of words that could fill in the gaps.</p> <p>Our deepest (1...) is not that we are inadequate, but that we are (2...) beyond measure. It is our (3...), not our darkness, that (4...) us. We ask ourselves. Who am I to be amazing, (5....) and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing (6....) about shrinking so that other people won't feel (7....) around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make (8....) the glory of God That is within us. It is not just in some of us; It is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we consciously give other people (9.....) to do the same. As we are (10.....)from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p><b>STEP:3</b> <b>Give answers</b></p> <p><b>Allow self-expression</b></p>	<p>Tell students the right answers and then have two of them read. In the first reading, students will try to understand the meaning and in the second reading they will prepare themselves to share their understanding. Now, ask students, "How does this poem make you feel?"</p> <p>Listen to their answers. 1-2 sentences each.</p> <p>Now, share students. Which is your favorite line and why?</p> <p>"It is not just in some of us; It is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same."</p>
<p>5</p>	<p><b>STEP:4</b></p> <p><b>Analysis of the poem</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does the title of the poem mean?</li> <li>2. What is the tone of the poem?</li> <li>3. How does the poem illustrate the current social situation in your life?</li> <li>4. What lines motivated you?</li> <li>5. What does the poet mean by saying:</li> </ol> <p><i>"We were born to make manifest the glory of God That is within us. It is not just in some of us; It is in everyone."</i></p> <p>Alternatively, teachers can create a space such as google doc, where different groups can write their agreed answers. Teachers can make a few queries around their answers before revealing recommended answers. Assign homework and say bye to the class</p>

**The Author:**

**Ms. Samikshya Bidari** is a Nepalese teacher-researcher. She is currently pursuing PhD in English Language Education at Kathmandu University, Nepal. She is dedicated to empowering students to be confident, emotionally intelligent and linguistically proficient global citizens of tomorrow. Some of her research interests include teachers' and learners' motivation, deliberative pedagogy, fostering language learners with 21st-century skills, and cultivating intercultural competence.

**References**

- Bidari, S. (2021) Engaging learners in an online classroom: A case study from Nepal. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices*, 3(7),01-06. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jweep.2021.3.7.1>
- Bobkina, J., & Dominguez, E. (2014). The use of literature and literary texts in the EFL classroom; between consensus and controversy. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(2), 248-260 <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.2p.248>
- Gutkovskii, A. (2021) *TLP: Poetry-based EFL Course for Japanese University Students*. Unpublished master's teaching and learning project. Soka University
- Hanauer, D. I. (2010). *Poetry as research: Exploring second language poetry writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hanauer, D. I. (2012). Meaningful literacy: Writing poetry in the language classroom. *Language Teaching*, 45(1), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444810000522>
- Kalogirou, T., Fernández Senís, J., & Mínguez-López, X. (2019). Editorial: Poetry in Literary Education. *Journal of Literary Education*, (2), pp. 1-7. doi: 10.7203/JLE.2. 16152
- Kramersch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Appendix****OUR DEEPEST FEAR**

Adopted from — **Marianne Williamson,**

**A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of “A Course in Miracles”, 1992**

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”